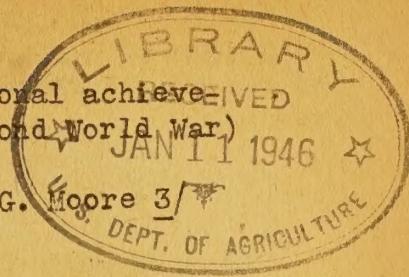


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Victory Gardens 1/

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(The story of one of the outstanding national achievements in the United States during the second World War)

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The Background

In the past century the United States has become a great industrial nation. The culture of its people, however, retains a predominant flavor of rural traits. Even among the large urban populations, many of the people are only a generation's distance from the soil. Barring a few great metropolitan centers, one is usually unable to distinguish, in the average Saturday night crowd, persons who live on the farm and persons who live in town.

In the year 1941, when the implications of the world-wide struggle between human freedom and totalitarianism made it certain that the United States would become involved, the rural trait of the Nation asserted itself. Those not of military age, or destined to be occupied in physical defense occupations, wanted an outlet for their patriotism. They wanted something to do besides buying defense bonds and reading in the papers of the sacrifices being made by others. The need was for something people could do with their hands that would also bring spiritual compensations.

Problem Approach

The Victory Garden program in the United States began in May 1941 with the appointment of an interbureau garden committee by the Secretary of Agriculture, Claude R. Wickard. This committee was headed by H. W. Hochbaum of the Extension Service. The committee made a careful study of the food situation with special regard for available supplies of commercially produced fruits and vegetables and also the availability of seed. Recognition was given to the fact that considerable damage could be done to such a Nation-wide garden movement if public sentiment were permitted to develop into unwarranted hysteria which might result in much waste of materials, seed, space, and effort, with the consequence that many gardeners would be discouraged before a real expansion in home gardening was needed.

The departmental committee appreciated the importance of cooperation with all other public and many private agencies that could in any way further an intelligently organized national garden movement. An interdepartmental garden committee was created and H. W. Hochbaum named as chairman. The committee included representatives of the Office of Education, Office of Civilian Defense,

1/ One of a series of case histories prepared for use in the conference on the Contribution of Extension Methods and Techniques Toward the Rehabilitation of War-torn Countries, held in Washington, D. C., September 19-22, 1944. Extension Service and Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations cooperating.

2/ Chairman, United States Government Victory Garden Committee.

3/ Information Manager, USDA Victory Garden Program.

Works Projects Administration, Consumer Division of the Office of Price Administration, the National Youth Administration, and the Nutrition Division of the Office of Defense Health and Welfare Services, Federal Security Agency. The two committees cooperated closely in planning a national defense garden program.

Program Is Born.

There emerged from these committee plans a call for a National Defense Garden Conference to be held in the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C., on December 19-20, 1941. Delegates from all over the country were invited to attend. They included representatives of public educational institutions and agencies such as the extension services of State agricultural colleges; vocational teachers; officials of State governments; leading authorities in the horticultural world; representatives of horticultural associations, garden clubs, and the seed trade; farm organizations; civic institutions; farm papers, national magazines, radio networks, and the general press. Every effort was made to include delegates from every possible field or agency which could make a contribution to a sound expansion of home gardens.

M. L. Wilson, Director of Cooperative Extension Work, Department of Agriculture, was chairman of the conference. The purpose of the conference, as set forth in the proceedings, was as follows:

"To discuss and formulate a broad, coordinated program for enlisting interest in and guiding a national campaign to encourage home and community gardens as a defense measure, emphasizing the expansion of better (1) farm vegetable gardens, (2) farm fruit gardens, (3) conservation of fruits and vegetables, (4) community and school gardens, and (5) conservation of lawns, flowers, and shrubs. Primary purpose of this campaign will be to reinforce the effort to reach the goal of 5,760,000 farm gardens for 1942, to improve health through encouraging better food habits and the use of high-vitamin and mineral foods; to improve home food supplies, and aid in maintaining moral."

The invitations for the conference were issued in November. On December 7 came Pearl Harbor. This stunning blow on the physical security of the United States reacted in an even greater desire on the part of the people to make a physical contribution toward winning what was now outright war. When the National Defense Conference opened on December 19, 1941, it served as a powerful influence in marshaling the spirit of united effort on the civilian war front.

Those who attended the conference were grouped to form six major committees. These were assigned to (1) farm vegetable gardens, (2) farm fruit gardens, (3) conservation of fruits and vegetables, (4) school and community gardens, (5) conservation of lawns, flowers and shrubs, (6) educational materials and techniques. The committees recommended and the conference adopted the recommendations here given. It should be noted that one of these recommendations was to change the name of the program from the National Defense Gardens Program to National Victory Garden Program. Thus was originated a name which has become household word throughout, the Nation. The conference chairman, M. L. Wilson, gave significance to this choice of names when he closed the conference with the following words:

"We came here yesterday to take part in the National Defense Gardening Conference. We go home this evening, each to his or her home State and community, with the knowledge that we have helped launch the National Victory Garden Program of the second World War. This change in name and designation of purpose is

symbolic of the change in attitude which this country has witnessed since Pearl Harbor. Today we no longer speak of defense. We speak of victory. And we do so with the confidence derived from knowing that the cause of democracy is just; that a united will to victory will see us through to a successful decision."

Recommendations Made by the
National Victory Garden Conference

1. That a National Victory Garden Program be launched immediately to encourage more farm vegetable gardens, more farm fruit gardens, more community-plot and school gardens, conservation of flowers, lawns, and shrubs.
2. That garden associations and clubs, the radio broadcasting industry, the daily and farm and garden press, horticultural and trade associations and magazines, welfare agencies, school teachers, volunteer groups, and all agencies of local, State, and Federal Governments in position to help, be called on to cooperate in a coordinated, all-out, practical garden program.
3. That the United States Department of Agriculture and the State agricultural colleges be the primary source of subject-matter information.
4. That the State extension services take the lead in holding State Victory Garden conferences similar to the national conference.
5. That a continuing advisory committee be set up to advise on and help coordinate the garden activities of all agencies and groups.
6. That the experience gained in the last war be given due consideration to avoid the mistakes made then.
7. That opportunity be given boys and girls under adequate leadership to participate in this Victory Garden Program as part of their education.
8. That where urban dwellers who wish to garden are without suitable facilities for home gardening activities, efforts be made to give them opportunity to participate in planned community gardening under qualified guidance.
9. That throughout this program special emphasis be placed on effectively harvesting, handling, storing, preserving, and utilizing garden products as no less important than growing them well, and that careful consideration be given to the conservation of supplies, equipment, and human energy.
10. That the cultivation of the soil, including the growing of trees, shrubs and flowers, be emphasized in the Victory Garden Program as an invaluable part of a productive and satisfying life, and as an aid to morale in time of war.
11. That the production, quality, and distribution of seed be carefully checked and regulated.
12. That the Victory Garden Program be coordinated with the National Nutrition Program to insure the growing of the right kinds and quantities of fruits and vegetables to meet family and community needs.

The First Year

The idea of Victory Gardens took hold. Magazines, and the press generally, published much on vegetable gardens, and the extension services of the land-grant colleges made home gardening, especially on the rural front, a number one project. Horticultural specialists and county agents gave technical help and advice to garden groups in town as well as country, to community projects as well as individuals. The Department of Agriculture prepared a 12-page circular, "Victory Gardens," covering the major phases of home vegetable gardening. Supplementing this were millions of copies of various circulars and bulletins on Victory Gardens. The State extension services took the leadership in preparing State publications which took into account climate, soils, temperatures, and other conditions, and thereby furnished advice for sound local garden practice. Farm gardens increased very much in number. Some cities, like Chicago, took an early and energetic lead in developing vacant lots for community gardens by the thousands. Many of these gardens nestled close to large apartment houses, and others were in the sparsely settled districts. Victory gardening had arrived, and reliable polls indicated that there were about 16-1/2 million Victory Gardens in the United States in 1942.

One of the most helpful agencies was the National Victory Garden Advisory Committee appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture. Governor Prentice Cooper of Tennessee was, and continues to be chairman of this committee. The full list of committee members follows:

Prentice Cooper, Governor of Tennessee (Chairman)
Paul Stark, President, National Victory Garden Institute
D. W. Watkins, Director of Extension, South Carolina
Connie Bonslagel, State Home Demonstration Leader, Arkansas
E. L. D. Seymour, The American Home
Andrew Wing, National Victory Garden Institute
Dr. Howard A. Dawson, National Education Association
W. Atlee Burpee, Burpee Seed Co.
Miss Aline Kate Fox, Garden Clubs of America
E. H. Rakken, Boy Scouts of America
E. I. Farrington, Secretary, Massachusetts Horticultural Society
Jean Boyd, San Francisco, Calif.
P. O. Davis, Director of Extension, Alabama
George Donoghue, Director of Victory Gardens, Chicago, Ill.
Frank Mullen, Vice President, National Broadcasting Co.
Lester J. Norris, State Chairman Victory Gardens, Illinois
Kirk Fox, Successful Farming, Des Moines, Iowa.

Program Expands

From the beginning, the Victory Garden program was closely linked with better nutrition as a health measure, especially in wartime. The recommendations of the National Conference in 1941 were marked by the emphasis placed on the need for including more fruits and vegetables in the diet. All gardeners, too, were urged specifically to grow vegetables high in vitamin and mineral values, especially the green and leafy vegetables, tomatoes, and yellow vegetables. Subsequent annual Victory Garden programs developed by the Government committees likewise reemphasized these needs.

The conditions facing the Nation in 1943, as seen by the Victory Garden committees and leaders, called for nothing short of a widespread national campaign

to utilize all possible suitable garden space for Victory Gardens, and to have homemakers can or otherwise preserve the largest possible quantity of fruits and vegetables. The tremendous needs of the military forces and of the lend-lease program took an estimated 25 percent of our food, including great quantities of canned and dried fruits and vegetables. So the goal for 1943 was set at 18 million Victory Gardens -- about 6 million on farms and 12 million in towns and cities. Then came food rationing, and the high number of ration points required for some of the common canned fruits and vegetables gave further stimulus to Victory gardening and home food preservation. Fresh fruits and vegetables were also rather high in price, and some, like cabbage, potatoes, and onions, were all too rare in the market. Meanwhile, garden leaders, educational forces, garden clubs and committees, and Victory Garden sponsors generally, did a much better job of organizing forces and planning a campaign than previously. The two Government committees were merged into one U. S. Government Victory Garden Committee. Plans were worked out with the Office of War Information to take full advantage of the cooperation given by the radio, newspapers, and magazines to all-out wartime campaigns. A special Victory Garden Campaign Handbook was prepared by the Office of War Information and War Food Administration for advertisers and others who wished to support the garden program. This booklet presented the high lights of the food situation and pointed out how the individual could do his part by growing food in gardens on farms, in city back yards, school gardens, and community plots.

Nation-wide Cooperation

Hundreds of newspapers carried on campaigns of their own. Many radio shows and stations did the same. The campaign caught the fancy of cartoonists and syndicated-strip artists, who played up the need for Victory Gardens in serious as well as humorous vein. The Department bulletin on Victory Gardens was published in an edition of 3-1/2 million copies. The State agricultural colleges through their extension services put out many new publications on gardening. The California Extension Service alone put out over a million pieces of mail on gardening and home food production. The Iowa Extension Service printed and distributed 400,000 copies of the Iowa Victory Garden circular. Other State extension services, likewise, made a strong effort to reach the great mass of people with sound and fresh information on gardening. Garden magazines redoubled their efforts, and general magazines carried lead articles on gardening. Many commercial concerns brought out large editions of attractive booklets on gardening. Thousands of Victory Garden posters were displayed. A special program for town and city gardeners was broadcast once a week on the National Farm and Home Hour on the Blue Network, from February 1 to November 1, 1943, over 100 stations. The Columbia Network also broadcast a weekly program for gardeners in which the Department cooperated. Scores of individual stations broadcast their own garden programs. Nationally known radio commentators and entertainers helped to keep the Victory Garden idea before the public throughout the season.

Motion pictures and slidefilms were used widely to arouse interest in gardening and to teach cultural practices. The Department made two 2-reel movies in color, one on gardening and the other on home canning. Business concerns also made movies on these subjects.

Hundreds of business concerns, including a number of large railroads, promoted Victory Gardens, giving their employees permission to use right-of-ways for gardens and giving them circulars of instruction. Filling stations operated by some of the larger oil companies displayed garden seeds for sale and gave away

booklets on gardening. Some large manufacturing companies provided land for their employees and prepared and fertilized the ground. In Middletown, Ohio, every factory did this, and that town of 30,000 people reported about 3,500 gardens on such areas and in home yards. The National Victory Garden Institute, a privately financed garden bureau, has made its main purpose that of interesting industrial concerns in promoting gardening and furnishing garden space for employees.

Evaluation of Results

Victory Gardens came to be one of the national everyday topics of interest and conversation. Victory Garden stories were front-page news. Large department stores opened special Victory Garden departments. Advertisers of general merchandise, utilities, services, carried notes to readers to have Victory Gardens.

Perhaps few national campaigns ever received such generous support from so wide a range of agencies and interests. Moreover, everything was voluntary, from the many days of free help and service given gardeners by thousands of volunteer local garden enthusiasts to the highly developed and costly campaigns conducted by some industrial concerns. No wonder, either, that the goal of 18 million set for the year was exceeded by at least two million.

Fortunately, American growers of vegetable seeds prepared for increased demands and produced good crops of the kinds of seeds generally needed by home gardeners. Therefore the seed supply for most needs was adequate in 1943. The fertilizer situation had also improved - supplies of garden implements were not sufficient generally, though some dealers had carry-over stocks. Those who could not buy tools borrowed from their neighbors. Insecticides and fungicides were obtainable throughout the year, though many substitutes had to be used because of the shortage of rotenone and pyrethrum. Dusters and sprayers were scarce and makeshifts not too satisfactory. But on the whole, no general serious losses were caused by insects and diseases.

Despite heavy rains and floods in the Midwest and Southwest, and a severe drought in the East, the yields of the Victory Gardens generally were good. Considering the fact that probably one half of the gardeners were rank beginners, Department officials and others who saw many gardens in various parts of the country were impressed with the results. An unofficial estimate by economists of the Department placed the production from Victory Gardens in 1943 at 8 million tons. If this figure is anywhere nearly approximate, our Victory gardeners produced a little more than 40 percent of all vegetables grown for fresh consumption. And on countless pantry and basement shelves in millions of homes at the close of the season, there were rows and rows of canned vegetables for winter use rewarding the Victory gardener for his toil.

No better tribute could be paid to the share Victory gardeners played in augmenting and conserving our national food supply than was given by Col. J. N. Gage, Executive Office of the Chicago Quartermaster Depot, when he said:

"We have the longest line of communications ever attempted for the largest Army in the history of our Nation. This necessitates approximately 24 million meals daily, which are so planned as to give maximum satisfaction of taste as well as nutritional qualities which produce energy and protect each soldier from falling prey to

the ravages of deficiency diseases. This has all been made possible by the long-range vision of those who have made food available to the armed forces. One of the most important contributions to this program has been Victory Gardens, for without the crops of these tireless patriotic urban truck farmers I feel that it would have been necessary to lend a sympathetic ear to the food demands of our civilian population, which could have upset the best-laid plans for properly feeding the Army. We know that Victory gardening has been a national success. So successful that I am inclined to believe that Victory Gardens in connection with home canning have almost covered the entire deficit caused by withdrawals of processed food for war use."

